

# Los Angeles Times

## SCAG seeks air quality state of emergency

**The group wants a state of emergency declared over premature deaths linked to Southland pollution.**

From a Times Staff Writer

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The Southern California Assn. of Governments voted Thursday to urge President Bush and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to declare a state of emergency in the region because of more than 5,400 premature deaths that the state has estimated are linked annually to air pollution.

"When we have a hurricane or earthquake, they declare a state of emergency," said Hasan Ikhata, director of planning and policy for the regional body. "These numbers are out of this world ... so this is significant enough that they should do the same thing."

SCAG, made up of mayors and county supervisors from Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura and Imperial counties, is responsible for the transportation portion of plans designed to bring the region's air quality — the worst in the nation — into compliance with the federal Clean Air Act.

Federal officials said emergency declarations are issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for natural disasters and terrorist acts. The White House had no direct comment on SCAG's request, but White House Council on Environmental Quality spokeswoman Kristen Hellmer said, "The administration has taken great strides to improve our nation's air quality; and since the president took office, the level of pollutants in our skies has decreased by more than 10%."

The governor's office did not comment. California Air Resources Board Chairman William Sawyer said he couldn't comment on SCAG's request because it was a legal issue, but "we agree the air pollution problem in Southern California is a very serious public health problem and has been for decades. We're working very aggressively to try to solve it."